

Activist Notes

DIARY WITH THE NAME OF WOMAN ... FACES AND VOICES FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE

by *Judith Conde Pacheco*

When the Vieques Women's Alliance began and we started to work as a group, we realized what a wealth of accumulated experience there was in each of the women, of which few people were aware. Sharing with other groups of women on Puerto Rico's big island and outside Puerto Rico, we saw the need to know and bring together women's histories and experiences in order to create an understanding and reciprocal empathy toward the various proposals for work.

The "Peace Diarists," the women of Vieques, made invisible by history—like the rest of women in the world—have contributed and continue to contribute a great deal to the development of their communities. Their contribution has been oriented toward the integration of women in actions for the construction of a Culture of Peace. Nevertheless, these contributions have not been sufficiently recognized or valued. Our untold stories are necessary to organize and process, to recover our identity and to change the visions that some have of the participation of women in the social, political, and economic transformation of society.

WHY A DIARY

Blanca Silvestrini notes that there are many silences in Puerto Rican historiography and that the stories of women and the history of gender have been part of those silences.¹ She also suggests that the everyday struggles of women, their multiple forms of understanding and changing the world in which they live, their conflicts and strengths, have only been considered as history in the last two decades.

In this work, women are recognized as "diarists" because they make and write stories daily. The everyday is used, in this case through a

PEACE & CHANGE, Vol. 31, No. 1, January 2006
© 2006 Peace History Society and
Peace and Justice Studies Association

diary, as a metaphor and guide for the reconstruction of life histories and for the continuity of our work as WOMEN. Upon turning the pages with the name of women, we will be able to remember, learn, dream, make plans, and make history on the basis of our own daily stories.

This diary is a visual and descriptive resource that uses elements of qualitative research and historiography to gather in organized form the achievements, convergences, and divergences of the Vieques Women's Alliance and of Vieques women, with the aim of making visible the individual and collective experiences of these women, who are "peace diarists." By systematizing these experiences, I have been able to gather and know the perceptions, feelings, and values of the participants from their own reality. In the diary I used the concepts of "face" and "voice" to defend and revalue the life and experiences of the women, as postulated in feminist pedagogy. In that pedagogy, the concepts of experience and voice are central precisely because women's experiences and voices have been denied in the dominant intellectual tradition. Weiler (2003)² suggests that feminist teachers, in directly questioning the concept of voice, attempt to motivate students to reflect on the meanings of privilege and silence.

IBIS CINTRON, ART TEACHER
 ART PROJECT COORDINATOR, "VIEQUES CHILDREN SEEK
 PEACE"
 AND THEY KEPT ME INSIDE AT SIX

My anti-Navy awareness was created in my childhood. I was born in 1954, fourteen years after the expropriations [by the Navy of the homes] of my parents and grandparents. I began to understand the damage the Navy did to us when I saw the soldiers abusing the people.

Every day big trucks arrived full of hundreds of soldiers and they let them loose on Luis Muñoz Rivera Street, the town's main street, where I lived. In front of my house there was building called the U.S.O. where the sailors would enjoy themselves because it was their official club and every afternoon at 6:00 p.m. they came and dispersed throughout the town. My papa always said to my mama: "It's almost six o'clock, you have to keep the girls in" (my sister and me), and we couldn't leave our house.

They got drunk, they did drugs, and got into fights provoking the *viequenses*. There were always gangs of youths from the different island neighborhoods to fight with the sailors and defend against whatever

offense was made against the town. I lived all my childhood and part of my youth under a curfew, which consisted of a siren that sounded from the police station in front of the main plaza every night at 9:00. Any minor under 21 years old found in the street was brought to their house with a reprimand to their parents or caregivers. It was embarrassing for any youth to be taken home by the police patrol, while it was a thing of pride if they arrested him for fighting with some “gringo,” which is what we called the sailors. The siren was sounded to prevent the fights, but they always happened. When there was a bloody weekend, we would get to school on Monday to see which friends were most beaten up and abused, and these would become the heroes of the week.

As a woman I couldn't fight with my fists like the other *viequenses*, but I was in hundreds of protests and picket lines, putting in my grain of sand so that on May 1, 2003, we would see the dream made reality: The Navy out of Vieques! I know there is still a lot to do and I will continue struggling, but with great satisfaction and pride that my three daughters inherited my conscience and will continue the path I began ... when they kept me inside at six.

ZAIDA TORRES RODRIGUEZ, NURSE
PROJECT COORDINATOR OF WOMEN'S ALLIANCE HOUSE
HOPE IS BORN WITH YOU ...

For the first time I am writing about events that mark where my hope was born. A few years ago my first granddaughter, Mitzie, was born, a hope for life together with the greatest sadness of my life, the loss of my only daughter Liza. In spite of it all, a year later my second granddaughter was born. Her father named her Liza.

After the death of David Sanes, I began gradually to participate in activities to get the Navy out of Vieques, convinced that the main factor that made my daughter sick with cancer were the military maneuvers. I was given the chance to travel for the first time to Washington as a People's Lobbyist, bringing the truth in my heart. But you know, I had a problem, my husband worked for the military in Camp Garcia. God freed me of those bonds, and after 27 years of service, my husband was able to retire. You can't imagine how free I felt inside; at last I could freely express all my feelings.

I began to participate in the Vieques Women's Alliance and openly attend all the activities. In February and March came the opportunity to travel to Philadelphia and give a presentation on the reality of Vieques

women at several universities and to be a speaker for the first time. But God has saved the thing would mark my life for another event. After 20 years, the only birthing clinic [in Vieques] was built. On September 6, 2002, it was inaugurated.

Oh my God! On September 16 at 12:25 in the morning, the first *viequense* was born there, marking a new phase in the history of our people, a premature baby born at 29 weeks. My God, he cried, he is alive, weighs 3 pounds, 2 ounces! The pediatrician said he is compromised by the immaturity of his lungs, but he is strong and probably will live. But you know what? He went on, is now a year old. What a privilege, to be the grandmother of the first *viequense*! What more can I ask of life!

The death of my daughter determined my path, and the birth of my grandson is part of the history of my people. Luisito, hope is born with you ... Today I have been given the best opportunities to help my people—especially the women—the future of my land, the children and youth so they can have a better quality of life. Divine God! I give you thanks for giving me the strength to recognize what my true path was, to my family for believing in me, and to the Vieques Women's Alliance for providing me the space to participate in the processes and decision-making that affect me and my people.

NOTES

1. Blanca Silvestrini, "Genero e Histografia," in J. Carides, M. Perez, E. Quinones, & G. Rodriguez (eds.), *Voces Que Reclaman Paz* (Universidad de Puerto Rico en Rio Piedras, 1997), 6.

2. K. Weiler, "Pedagogía Feminista de la Diferencia," in L. Martínez y M. Tamargo (eds.), *Género, Sociedad y Cultura* (Puerto Rico: Publicaciones Gaviota, 2003), 247–261.

Copyright of Peace & Change is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.